

Chief cuckoo clock surgeon

By Jessica McKay

Lloyd Lehn retired 12 years ago, after a 35-year career as a mechanical/manufacturing engineer with the Department of Defense. But his lifelong love of detangling mechanical problems didn't stop there.

Today, you can find him in his own personally designed and whimsically-named workshop — the Cuckoo Clock Hospital, of which he is the chief surgeon. There, Lehn has been fixing cuckoo clocks for 20 years: oiling, cleaning, replacing and adjusting clock movements and music boxes. It became his full-time vocation after retiring in 2003.

Lehn and his wife Laura moved in 2013 from their home in Annandale, Va., to the Greenspring retirement community in Springfield, Va. He quickly set up shop in his apartment. He receives many referrals from local clock shops and works on one or two cuckoo clocks per week, on average.

Much of Lehn's business is local, but he has also repaired cuckoos from all over the country, including ones from Idaho, Illinois, Florida, Missouri, Nevada, Tennessee and Washington.



Pursuit requires patience

Why cuckoo clocks?

"Most clockmakers won't work on cuckoos. It takes a lot of trial and error work," he said. "I'm not so sure they are harder to repair, but repair people don't like them. Many think the only tool one should use [on them] is a sledge hammer."

But teasing out the puzzle of what has gone wrong with the clock's innards is right up Lehn's alley.

"They are machines, and I like to try to figure out how machines work and to fix them when they don't. It's always a challenge for me," he said.

He said one must have the patience to work on them: "Like anything else, the more experience you have doing it, the easier it becomes."

While he has affection for the clocks and their mechanical birds that announce each hour, he's not a collector himself. He has only one cuckoo clock that functions, plus several that do not. The one that works is a cuckoo that had a standard movement when he got it; he later put in a quartz movement.

Lloyd Lehn sits in the workshop area of his apartment, which he calls the Cuckoo Clock Hospital, at Greenspring Village in Springfield, Va. Lehn, a retired mechanical engineer, has fixed cuckoo clocks from throughout the United States, patiently using trial and error to find and repair problems in the clocks.

Post-doc certification

Lehn earned his B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees in mechanical engineering, and has published many articles on a variety of topics — from statistics and operations research to deer deterrents.

He first attended a clock class offered through Fairfax County about 30 years ago, and began working exclusively on cuckoo clocks about 10 years later.

He completed 12 semesters of the local clock repair class/workshop, then went on to earn designation as a Certified Clockmaker from the American Watchmakers-Clockmakers Institute (AWCI). He was also elected to the AWCI board of directors, and currently represents the local Potomac Clock Guild as a board member of the

Horological Association of Virginia (HAV).

The largest cuckoo clock he ever repaired was three-feet tall. It is part of the décor of a Georgetown restaurant. When it arrived, the clock was covered with 60 years of smoke and grease from the restaurant's kitchen.

"It took me over 10 hours to clean it with cleaners, toothbrushes and dental picks," he recalled. "It is a beautiful clock." Now.

But repairing cuckoo clocks also has high-tech components. Lehn uses a timing device called MicroSet and its associated computer software program to record, analyze and adjust the cuckoo mechanism. "It's sort of like a clock EKG," he said.

See **CUCKOO FOR CLOCKS**, page 45

Cuckoo for clocks

From page 1

The device provides detailed information and precise measurements regarding the timing and beat of a clock. These metrics and diagnostics allow him to properly adjust the cuckoo.

For those with a mechanical bent of their own, Lehn sells DVDs he's prepared

showing how to repair cuckoo clocks, and their music boxes, step by step. Previews of both DVDs are available on YouTube.

Valuable in many ways

While there is some dispute regarding the origins of cuckoo clocks, they appear to have originated in Germany's Black Forest area in the mid-18th century. Most of the cuckoos Lehn works on are German-made Black Forest cuckoo clocks with move-

ments made by Regula and Hubert Herr.

One might imagine such antiques are quite valuable. But Lehn avoids estimating the monetary value of any cuckoo clock he sees, and notes that most people value their clocks for personal reasons.

"Ninety-percent of the value is related to emotional attachment," he said. He specifically recalled one customer's tearful joy after hearing her grandmother's cuckoo clock sounds for the very first time.

"If there is a lot emotional attachment, they want to spend a lot of money on them," Lehn said.

"Once they get out of here, I don't want them to come back. That means I've done my job."

For more about the Cuckoo Clock Hospital, or to schedule an appointment, visit Lehn's website at www.cuckooclockhospital.com or call (703) 256-2684. You can reach him via email at lloyd.lehn@verizon.net.